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1838

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



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WASHINGTON, D.C.





# HINTS

ON

## THE SUBJECT OF INTERMENTS

WITHIN THE CITY

OF

PHILADELPHIA :

ADDRESSED TO THE SERIOUS CONSIDERATION OF THE

MEMBERS OF COUNCILS,

COMMISSIONERS OF THE DISTRICTS,

AND

CITIZENS GENERALLY.

BY

ATTICUS: *47.7*

*18399*

Philadelphia.

WILLIAM BROWN, PRINTER.

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## INTRODUCTION.

The subject of interments within the populous parts of the city of New York, having been a very interesting one during the residence of the publisher of the following pages in that place, his mind was led to reflect on its injurious effects, and to desire that the facts then elicited, should be more extensively promulgated. After removing to Philadelphia, and becoming a permanent resident there, he frequently expressed his opinion to many prominent and intelligent citizens, who all agreed with him in thinking the topic deserved attention. He now, therefore takes the liberty of circulating this pamphlet in the sincere hope that it may become the humble means of awakening the public mind to a most important and interesting consideration. Lest it might be supposed that he has pecuniary motives in the publication, he begs distinctly to state, that he has no interest whatever in any grave yard, cemetery, or church ground—that he is solely prompted thereto by a desire to impress his fellow citizens with the danger to their health as well as to the health of posterity by the present mode of interment.\* After full consideration, the councils of New York prohibited burials within the city in 1823, under heavy penalties; that this may be soon the result in all our populous cities is the desire of

ATTICUS.

NOTE.—No allusion is made in the following pages to the beautiful Cemetery of Mount Auburn, near Boston, which has been eminently successful in winning the affections of the Bostonians as well as of strangers, for the obvious reason, that its benefits and advantages are well known and understood.





# INTERMENTS

WITHIN POPULOUS CITIES.

So many arguments can be adduced to prove that interments should never be made within populous cities, that a writer who would condense his materials within a small compass finds it difficult to select those facts which would most forcibly affect the public mind. In the annexed brief view, the compiler will principally follow in the track of the able committee on Laws, in their Report to the Corporation of the City of New York, made on the 9th of June, 1821, and published in an octavo volume by their order.

This Committee says emphatically that “the practice of interring the dead within the thickly inhabited portion of our city, in all its branches, and in every form, is injurious to the living. If this be so, why procrastinate the remedy so obviously within the comprehension of the most ordinary mind, and within the reach no less of the citizen, than of the public authority?” They then adduce an argument which applies with equal force to Philadelphia—“Our city is progressing in all the essential particulars that are to constitute its future greatness, and with that progress, a wise and prudent government ought to be studious to indentify every measure of policy and foresight, that can insure to ourselves, the numerous emigrants that are seeking an abode and settlement among us, to that posterity, whose dearest interests are confided to our hands, the invaluable objects of security to their health and lives, against the ravages of pestilence or epidemic disease in any form, no less than the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty, and the other blessings of life.”

It has been so universal in former ages, to have the places of burial without the walls of cities, that the fact of those in Philadelphia being found in the most densely populated parts, would seem to require some explanation, to redeem the character of the early settlers from an imputation of thoughtlessness. The explanation is a simple one. Philadelphia was originally built along the margin of the Delaware; its fashionable street was next to the river, and the whole extent for many years was bounded by Second or Third streets; the grave yards are all beyond those precincts, except, perhaps that of the Swedes. The streets above Second were unpaved; carriages were extremely rare, and to have gone further than Fourth or Fifth streets would have been almost impracticable in winter and early spring weather: we consequently find several religious societies established their cemeteries at those points, without due consideration for the natural increase of population, or possibly not anticipating that in the course of a few years the town would extend from the Delaware to the Schuylkill.—The result so little anticipated has come upon us, and we are living surrounded by the dead. As if this first error had not even yet been visible to the citizens, every subsequent attempt to fix upon scites for burial, with but one exception, has been attended with the same want of foresight; the borders of the city have been selected, and before the grave yards have been half filled, the surrounding squares have been built up with substantial tenements. Shall we perpetuate this evil, or by an act of wholesome legislation, *to take effect gradually*, shall we avert serious ground of complaint from the minds of those who are to come after us. The writer in this place forbears to enter into particulars of those cases of wanton desecration which have disfigured the annals of Philadelphia; they are too recent not to have left strong impressions on the minds of the citizens, who have doubtless come to the

conclusion that what has occurred may occur again ; that their own remains may be disturbed by the ruthless hand of speculation, if care is not now taken to provide against it. Neither will he dwell minutely upon the fact that almost the entire plot of this city is situated above an argillaceous stratum, suited to the composition of bricks, and which from its very nature necessarily retains all the water which falls upon it, and deposits it in and about the coffins consigned to its keeping. Every undertaker is acquainted with this fact, but the citizens generally are ignorant that they have, in too many instances, deposited their friends in a soil very little better adapted to the object than that at New Orleans, where the feelings of horror and disgust have compelled the deposit of the dead within tombs erected above ground, walled in from the weather. This topic is a painful one, but it should be carefully enquired into.

In support of the position that grave yards should be far removed from the abodes of the living, the writer will now beg leave to introduce such examples from the records of history and medical opinion as are calculated to vindicate and recommend it, and to obviate every objection that can be raised. In this inquiry the report of the New York Committee sets forth that "Among the Jews, the general custom seems to have been, that the dead should be buried without the city. The proofs of this are to be inferred from the instances of Abraham, who purchased at Hebron, the cave of Machpelah, which was in a field for a burying place, that, in the emphatic language of the Scripture, he might bury his dead out of his sight, and in which his wife, himself, and Isaac and Jacob were afterwards buried. The body of Joseph was buried in a plot of ground in Shechem. Moses was buried in a valley in Moab. Eleazer was buried on a hill. And there are many other instances which are collected by Dr. Rees, in his Cy-

clopedia, title ‘burial,’ where may also be found the proofs of a similar practice among the Egyptians, the Persians, the inhabitants of Greece, Sicily, and Asia, and to this day among the Chinese, and many other nations. Among the Romans, the practice of interment without the city prevailed, it appears, before the Law of the Twelve Tables. And by that Law, it was expressly enacted, that no dead body should be buried or burned within the city. The practice continued among the Jews, until the latter period of their existence as a nation, as appears from the facts that Lazarus was buried at Bethany, a distance from Jerusalem; that Joseph of Arimathea, a man of high standing among the Jews, had his tomb near Golgotha; this became the sepulchre of our Saviour; that at the crucifixion, those who came to life *returned to the city*. And it is said of the demoniac, of whom the evangelists speak, that having broken his chains, *he fled into the desert, and dwelt among the tombs*. The Greeks also observed the same practice: Solon adopted it among his regulations, and at Athens, until the latter period of the republic, there was only a small number of persons interred within the walls. At Syracuse, the tombs were without the walls for the burial of the inhabitants. The Turks are extremely tenacious on this subject.

“In Gregory’s Dictionary of Arts, Vol. 1, title ‘burial,’ it is stated that “the place of burial among the Jews was in the country, upon the highways, in gardens, and upon mountains. Among the Greeks, the temples were made repositories for the dead, in the primitive ages; yet the general custom in the latter ages with them, as well as with the Romans, and other heathen nations, was to bury their dead without the cities, and chiefly by the highways. Among the primitive Christians, burying in cities was not allowed for the

first 300 years, nor in churches for many ages after ; the dead bodies being first deposited in the atrium or church yard, and porches or porticos of the church."

The Law of the Twelve Tables of Rome, in addition to the provision that no dead body should be buried or burned within the city, decrees "that no sepulchre shall be built or funeral pile raised *within sixty feet of any house, without the consent of the owner of the house.*" See Cooper's *Justinian*, 662, 663. This law was enacted by the Decemviri in the year before Christ 451, was incorporated in the laws of the succeeding forms of government, was extended and put in force over the whole empire, and continued until the time of Pope Gregory the first, A. D. 596, a period of 1047 years. The Christian Emperors, in re-enacting this law, believed that burial was designed, not for the sake of the dead but of the living, and the text of the law requiring that interments should be without the city to preserve the sanctity, *sanctitatem*, of the residences of the living, was altered so as to read, that they should be removed to preserve the health, *sanitatem*, of the citizens, lest the dead bodies should infect the city with pestiferous exhalations. "But," says the learned Justice Abney, Willes's Reports 537, "when Popery grew to its height, and blind superstition had weakened and enervated the laity, and emboldened the Clergy to pillage the laity, then in the time of Pope Gregory the 1st, and soon after, other canons were made, that Bishops, Abbots, Priests and faithful laymen were permitted the honour of burial in the church itself, and all other parishoners in the church yard, on a pretence that their relations and friends on the frequent view of their sepulchres, would be moved to pray for the good of the departed souls.

"And as the parish Priest was, by the Canon Law, sole judge of the merits of the dead and the fitness of burial in

the church, and he would only determine who was a faithful layman, they only were judged faithful whose executor came up to the price of the Priest, and they only were allowed burial in the church, and the poorer sort were buried in the church yard."

To the account given by Dr. Rees of the innovation of Pope Gregory, which agrees in substance with the above, he adds, that Gregory's reason was, in the monkish ages, used as an epitaph, and inscribed on the sepulchres,

"Orate pro anima miserrimi peccatoris."

Pray for the soul of a most miserable sinner ;

and that it was transcribed into the body of the Canon Law. And that to this superstition, and the profit arising from it, we may ascribe the original of church yards. The practice of the Romish Church, as introduced by Gregory, was brought to England by Cuthbert, Archbishop of Canterbury, about A. D. 750, and the practice of erecting Vaults in Chancels, and under altars, was begun by Lanfrac, Archbishop of Canterbury, about A. D. 1075. Doctor Rees further states, that the primitive Christians did not allow of burials in cities, for the first 300 years, nor in churches for many years after.

From these historical relations, which however are by no means as extensive as the subject and researches would justify, it appears that the prohibition of the practice of interment in cities, in those ancient nations, was general, and that in the language of the authors referred to, the exceptions were both 'few and rare,' until the abuse became general, through the influence of Pope Gregory.

Three prominent and striking instances of the prohibition of city interments, in addition to that of New York, occur in the city of Toulouse, by the Archbishop of that diocese, in Paris, by the parliament of that city, and finally in all the cities and towns of France, by the decree of Louis XV. In the Council of Prague also, burials in churches were forbid-



den. England has lately been awakened to the importance of this subject, and near London, Liverpool, Bristol, and many other places, rural cemeteries have rapidly gained public approval; New Haven and Boston have set examples which have awakened public sentiment to the subject in all parts of the United States; in New England it has long been the custom to fix upon rural scites, removed some distance from the town or church. The following extracts from the "*Dictionnaire des Sciences Medicales*," a work edited and conducted by a society of eminent physicians and surgeons in Paris, affords the evidence of the profession to which it is desired to call public attention:

"It is at this day well known, and has been satisfactorily demonstrated, *that burials in cities greatly endanger the public health*; that the miasmata disengaged from burying places, may, and often have, caused frightful catastrophies, and that they not only give more virulence to prevailing maladies, but also originate contagious diseases, whose ravages have been terrible.

"Since the year 1776, all interments in cities and churches have been forbidden (in France.) And that important measure of police has been observed with so much rigour, that in 1810 an archbishop of Aix solicited in vain from government the favour of being buried in his own cathedral church.

"There must necessarily be a great many cemeteries for a large city; they should be situated, as far as localities will permit, on an elevated place—at a considerable distance from the city, and to the north of the dwelling houses—so that the south wind should not pass over them after being charged with emanations from the grave yards.

"The tombs of the Chinese are erected *out of their cities*, and almost always upon hills covered with pines and cypress.

It may be added that in *Denmark, Venice, Constantinople, Prague, Vienna*, and in many other places in Continental Europe—in *Lima* in South America—in *Port au Prince*—in the island of *Ceylon*—in *Greenland*—among the *Hottentots*—and also among the *Indians*, in North America, the practice of interment in cities, and in the neighbourhood of their villages, is prohibited.

That in *Dublin* the same prohibition exists, and was enacted in or about 1740, after a pestilential fever in that year, and the place of interment for the inhabitants is in the neighbourhood of the river Liffey, at a distance from the city.

In 1814, the commissioners of improvements reported to Parliament, that St. Margaret's church yard in *Westminster*, could not *with safety to the public health*, be used any longer for burying.

In 1707, Sir Christopher Wren, the architect of St. Paul's Cathedral, in a letter addressed to a joint commissioner with himself for building fifty churches in addition to others already built, to supply the place of those destroyed by the conflagration in 1666, observes—"I could wish that all burials in churches should be disallowed, which is not only unwholesome, but the pavements can never be kept even, nor pews upright; and if the church yard is close about the church, this also, is inconvenient. It will be enquired—where then shall be the burials? I answer, in cemeteries seated in the outskirts of the town."

*Pere la Chaise*, near Paris, is a spot just without the walls, where the ashes of Jew and Christian, Catholic and Protestant, repose in charitable vicinity. The ground is laid out with taste and elegance, diversified in position, beautified with shrubs and flowers, and appropriately adorned with monuments, some interesting from their historical recollections, some touching from the simplicity and tenderness of their in-



scriptions, all neat, decent, and appropriate to the solemnity of the scene."

In a report to the citizens of London on this subject, it is remarked:—The excellent Evelyn (agreeing with the testimony heretofore given of Sir Cr. Wren) regretted greatly that after the fire of London, advantage had not been taken of that calamity to rid the city of its burial places, and establish a necropolis without the walls. "I yet cannot but deplore," says he, in his *Sylva*, "that when that spacious area was so long a *rasa tabula*, the church yards had not been banished to the north walls of the city, where a grated enclosure of competent breadth, for a mile in length, might have served for an universal cemetery to all the parishes, distinguished by the like separations, and with ample walks of trees, the walks adorned with monuments, inscriptions, and titles, apt for contemplation, and memory of the defunct, *and that wise and excellent law of the Twelve Tables restored and renewed*. Such a funeral grove, with proper regulations and careful keeping, would have been an ornament and an honour to the metropolis, and might at this time have been as characteristic of the English, as the catacombs at Paris are of the French."

The beauty of the Mohammedan burial grounds has been noticed by all travellers. The Afghans call their cemeteries the cities of the silent; and hang garlands on the tombs and burn incense before them, because they believe that the ghosts of the departed dwell there, and sit, each at the end of his own grave, enjoying the fragrance of these offerings. The church yards in the reductions of Paraguay were so many gardens. The graves were regularly arranged and bordered with the sweetest plants and flowers, and the walks were planted with orange trees and palms. The Moravians in their missions observe the same regularity and decency: the name which they give to a burial ground is, 'God's ground.' In

many parts of Wales, the graves are carefully planted with flowers ; and the beauty of this custom is felt by all English travellers. In Gibson's addition to Camden, it is noticed, that the custom of planting rose trees upon the graves, anciently used both among the Greeks and Romans, had been observed time out of mind at Oakley in Surry.

The late Rev. Dr. Dwight, in writing upon the cemetery at New Haven, says : " The original settlers of New Haven buried their dead in a church yard. Their church was erected on the green or public square ; and the yard laid out immediately behind it. While the Romish apprehension concerning consecrated burial places, and the advantages supposed at the resurrection to attend those who are interred in them, remained, this location of burial grounds, seems to have been not unnatural.

" But since this apprehension has been perceived by common sense, to be groundless and ridiculous, the impropriety of such a location forces itself upon every mind.

" It is always desirable that a burial ground should be a solemn object to man ; because in this manner it easily becomes a source of useful instruction and desirable impressions.

" But when placed in the centre of a town, in the current of daily intercourse, it is rendered too familiar to the eye, to have any beneficial effect on the heart.

" From its proper, venerable character, it is degraded into a mere common object ; and speedily loses all its connexion with the invisible world, in a gross and vulgar union with the ordinary business of life." The distinguished writer, after noticing the other disadvantages of this ground, describes the new ground, which is at a distance from the city, in a minute and lucid manner, and remarks, that " It is incomparably more solemn and impressive than any spot of the same kind

within my knowledge ; and, if I am to credit the declarations of others, within theirs.

“An exquisite taste for propriety, is discovered in every thing belonging to it ; exhibiting a regard for the dead, reverential but not ostentatious, and fitted to influence the views and feelings of succeeding generations.

“ At the same time it precludes the use of vaults, by taking away every inducement to build them.

“ Those melancholy and disgusting mansions seem not to have been dictated by nature ; and are certainly not approved by good sense. Their salubrity is questionable ; and the impression left by them on the mind transcends the bounds of mourning and sorrow, and borders at least on loathing.”

After some further remarks, Doctor Dwight concludes by remarking, that he believes, “ the completion of this cemetery will extensively diffuse a new sense of propriety in disposing of the remains of the deceased.”

The New York Committee, in their report, enumerate on the subject of rural scites : “ The one in the city of Albany, the seat of government of our state, in which interments have for several years been directed to be at a distance from the dense population. Another is in the city of Washington the capitol of our country. With regard to which, a writer in the *National Journal* thus speaks : “ our burying grounds lie at some distance from the city, yet they bear testimony of the frequent visits which are made to them, by affectionate survivors, in the flowers which are to be oftentimes seen scattered over the silent mansions of the dead, and the solitary rose-tree, casting its fragrant and beautiful blossoms on the turf, an annual tribute to the memory of those who rest beneath.” And the town of Brooklyn, in King’s County, lying in view of our city, in consequence of our example, has recently purchased a small farm on the east side of Wallabout, and apportioned

part of the same among the different religious denominations, worshipping in that town, and also a public burying place, and have entirely ceased interring in the Potter's Field within the bounds of the village."

A very large portion of the report made to the Councils of New York, is devoted to the subject of the unhealthy odors and exhalations which physicians of all countries agree in stating are emitted from vaults. When opened, it is a common observation made by the sextons of Philadelphia, "We dare not descend into a vault until it has been left open for some time."—The process they designate by "*blowing off*:" that is, the foul air of the vault must have time to escape before it is possible to breathe the atmosphere. In a city, this exhalation is necessarily dispersed to the surrounding houses; the neighbours of Trinity Church, in New York, testified that when certain winds prevailed, in the warm season, they were obliged to keep their doors and windows closed, so very offensive was the smell from the putrescent bodies. This difficulty is experienced in more than one neighbourhood in the city of Philadelphia, as the writer is prepared to prove; he however avoids specifying the localities here, as he wishes not to call forth any angry feelings, or to bring to this important subject any topic which would disturb the peace of the community. He wishes any regulation that may be made should be *prospective* in its operation. The neighbors say:—

"We whose names are hereunto subscribed, certify that before and during a part of the time of the prevalence of the late yellow fever in New York, we resided in the neighbourhood of Trinity Church burying ground; that we were frequently annoyed with the offensive effluvia arising from the said burying ground, and particularly so when the wind swept over its surface, before reaching us. The stench was so powerful, as to oblige many of us to shut the doors and windows

of our stores and dwellings, to keep out the disagreeable and sickening smell. Signed by Joseph Brewster, Richard M'Kensie, Henry I. Megarey, Wm. Gale Clark, Pelletreau & Upson, and others. New York, Nov. 2, 1822."

*Extract of a letter from Jonathan Fisk, Esq. to Dr. Samuel Akerly, dated  
July 7, 1824.*

"DEAR SIR—I have received your favour of the 28th ult. You ask me for a statement of the facts I mentioned to you, relating to the Dutch Church Yard, corner of Liberty and Nassau Streets. During the summers of 1816 and 1817, I resided at No. 39, Liberty street, directly opposite the church yard. *In the hot months, whenever a vault was opened* on the side of the yard next to my residence, a very offensive stench was emitted from the vault, to such a degree, that we were compelled to shut the door and windows looking into the yard. Being frequently annoyed with this nuisance, I remonstrated with the Sexton against his opening the vaults in the morning, and permitting them to remain open during the day, to the annoyance of the neighbourhood. His reply was, *"that it would be as much as his life was worth to go into the vault, until it had stood open some time to air."* I applied to the Mayor to correct the proceeding. He said it was a subject of so much feeling with the citizens, that the Corporation would not interfere to regulate interments."

Dr. Picornel, in his "Considerations on the unhealthy condition of the city of New Orleans," published in 1823, says:—"Another source of disease, in that city deserves the greatest attention; it is a grave yard, now adjoining it, and much too small for its population, considering how greatly it contributes to the distressing mortality of its inhabitants.

"Let us discharge towards all our parents, friends, and fellow citizens, all possible testimonies of respect that are com-

manded by nature and by religion ; but let us also guard their survivors against the terrible and irremediable effects that must arise from animal putrid bodies exposed to the influence of heat and moisture.

“All the world acknowledges it to be demonstrated, that the miasmata arising from places of interment, may cause, and have caused the most distressing calamities. They not only give more intensity to the existing epidemics, but they bring forth other contagious diseases, which are equally calamitous.”

The next testimony, is, “an inquiry into, and observations upon, the causes of the epidemic disease which raged in Philadelphia” in the summer of 1793, by Jean Deveze, then surgeon and physician of the Military Hospital, and afterwards one of the physicians to the King of France.

At page 38 of his book he says, “among the particular causes (of the disease referred to,) *we may reckon burying grounds, in the midst of a city.* Those places of interment are injurious from the vapours which exhale from them, and corrupt the atmosphere ; and also by the miasmata, which the rain water carries with it as it filters through the earth, and passes into wells. This water used by the whole city must be pernicious, and should be particularly attended to, if in the end those dangers are to be avoided, which result from it. “At page 136 and onward, he observes, “there is another cause, which in my opinion, acts infinitely more on the animal economy, (than other causes he had been describing,) the prodigious number of burial places in the heart of the city.”

In a note at page 136, he says, “the voice of an enlightened body of men has induced the *French Nation* to banish burial grounds from their cities. Many persons here, pretend they could not at all affect the salubrity of the city, and ad-



vanced as a proof, the disease not being so frequent near those receptacles of the dead, as in other places. If this assertion were true, it could not confute my opinion; however, I do not pretend to say, the cause of the epidemic proceeded from the burial grounds alone, but I declare and maintain the putrid miasmata, which continually exhale, (however deep the grave might be) being mixed with miasmata, proceeding from other causes, must render the city less healthy, and corrupt the air through which it passes; this air thus charged with vapours, must be spread abroad, and affect persons at a distance, whilst those near the cemeteries escape, from not having come into immediate contact with that air."

Dr. Chapman, in the course of a review of a work on the "Dangers of Interment in Cities," by Dr. Felix Pascalis, of New York, thus gives his testimony:—

"It is difficult," says Dr. Chapman, "to conceive how physicians should, in any respect, be opposed to the opinion that receptacles of the dead in the midst of populous cities, are unhealthy and become often the source of wide spreading diseases—and how all the members of the medical profession, at all gifted with feelings of humanity, should not unite with Dr. Pascalis, and his reviewer in reprobating the pernicious custom, and soliciting its entire abolition. Already a very celebrated professor in a neighbouring college, (referring to Dr. Hosack) although he does not consider it indispensably necessary either for the comfort or health of its inhabitants, that the custom of city interments be altogether prohibited, recommends that they should be exclusively confined to public and private vaults, and that no grave ought to be permitted, under any circumstances; for such (says Dr. Hosack) is the loose texture of the soil in grave yards where this mode of burial is practiced, that as soon as the decomposition of the body has begun, the gases which are extricat-

ed will find egress and mix with the atmosphere, rendering it more or less offensive and impure, and consequently a medium of spreading contagious diseases, that may be introduced within the sphere to which such impure air may extend. (Hosack, Med. Pol. page 42) It is true (continues Dr. Chapman) vaults, may under certain circumstances be admitted to be innoxious; but as Dr. Pascalis very well observes, (page 113) they cannot be depended on always—decay, accidents, or neglect, are continually at hand to undermine their supposed safety. It is to be hoped therefore, that the very learned and authoritative professor (Dr. H.) whose opinion we have mentioned above, will ere long acknowledge the danger of vaults, and extend his proscription to them as well as to graves, and that this testimony will have sufficient weight and influence on the minds of the proper authorities, to cause their entire prohibition, and to promote the establishment of appropriate places out of the city for the disposition of the dead.”

One of the very remarkable points of the controversy between the owners of vaults and the Councils of the city of New York was found to be an opinion given in writing by many of the most respectable physicians, that vaults were not unwholesome to the community, but that graves were! The physicians might have been influenced by the wishes of their more wealthy patients, for the proposition carried absurdity on its very face, and was thus controverted by the Committee :

“ The proposition, then, is, that graves should be closed, and the use of vaults, public and private, be allowed. The reason given, is, that the loose texture of the soil by which *graves* are covered, will permit gases to escape, that will render the air more or less impure, and a medium of spreading contagious diseases—while, with regard to *vaults*, the proposed precautions are to cover the floors with a stratum of lime,



and the walls with the same material. In attending to these statements, it must not be forgotten, that, in the case of graves, the interment of the body must be six feet below the surface ; whereas, in the case of a vault, the depth of earth thrown over the mouth of it does not exceed 2 or 3 feet, and the statement of Dr. Hosack is, that by means of the loose texture of the soil in grave yards, the offensive and impure gases *will escape* and affect the atmosphere—and the intended statement, or at least the inference is, that through the thickness of earth thrown over a vault, the gases *will not escape*.”

The error was further disproved by fact and argument, not necessary to be here repeated. The Grand Jury, after enumerating various means against the attacks of yellow fever, and of preserving the public health, proceeded, about the time of the Committee's report, as follows :—“ Much discussion has taken place, and some diversity of opinion been expressed on the subject of interment within the populous parts of the city. The Grand Jury are of opinion, that *the custom* is highly obnoxious, and may be *one of the exciting causes* of disease in a climate so peculiarly affected by the heat of summer. They beg leave therefore *strongly to urge its discontinuance*. They are aware that on this subject strong prejudices are to be encountered ; these however will yield to the pressing call of *public safety*, and the urgent necessity of guarding the *public health*. On this subject their impressions may be incorrect, but if there exists the remotest possibility, that interments within the city may be productive of disease, there can be no hesitation in saying that the *practice* should be discontinued.”

“Which presentment was signed by all the Grand Jury.”

The Committee close their successful appeal to facts thus :

“The construction of this phrase “*Let me bury my dead out of my sight,*” so full of meaning, and so expressive of sorrow, is furnished to us by our own experience and reflections ; and accordingly, when death has passed before us its terrible and desolating majesty, and the wife of our

bosom, or the child of our love, the parent to whom we are bound by the ties of consanguinity and affection, or the friend with whom we have held sweet converse, has been torn from our embrace, and has ceased to delight our existence,—and after we have committed the remains to the tomb, how naturally and with what promptitude do we choose the sequestered shade, and the bosom of solitude, to contemplate at intervals the memory of the beloved and departed object of our affections. And if in that shady retreat, and in the depth of that solitude, the mound should be raised, and the stone be placed, which should remind us of the form and recall the name of that object, how sacred would be the retreat and how amply should we experience the pious consolations and the joy springing out of sorrow, at our periodical visit to the grave, compared with a walk through our church yards in the midst of our city, interrupted as we are, by the bustle, and noise, and the sports that are around us.”

Much detail has been omitted in this reference to the New-York Committee’s Report, which will there be found *in extenso*, as unnecessary to convince any unprejudiced mind; descriptions revolting to the tenderest feelings of our nature have been studiously avoided. The sole object of the writer has been to call public attention to the subject of our mode of burial, and to have it regulated by public ordinance, before other squares are taken up for the purpose, which must soon, like all those now in use, be surrounded in their turn by dwellings. He proposes that, “*Councils and Commissioners of the several Districts should pass an Ordinance, that after the year 18—, no interments within the limits of the city and liberties shall be allowed.*”

In making this proposition he begs to urge, that this course would lead to less controversy than an ordinance which should take immediate effect, and he believes that before the period fixed upon every individual would be reconciled to the law.

ATTICUS.





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1877

Philadelphia.

WILLIAM BROWN, PRINTER.

1838.





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